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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 TRSE-00
OMB-01 ACDA-12 AID-05 EB-08 MCE-00 /102 W
----------016177 141853Z /72
O R 141501Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2577
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
AMEMBASSY JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NY
USMISSION SINAI
CINCEUR

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, US, IS
SUBJECT: CBUS EXPLODE ONTO FRONT PAGES

REF: TEL AVIV 4872

1. SUMMARY: AFTER A PERIOD OF EXTREMELY LIMITED PRESS COVERAGE, THE CBU CONTROVERSY EXPLODED ONTO THE FRONT PAGES TODAY. NUMEROUS ARTICLES INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING POINTS, MADE WITH VARIOUS DEGREES OF PRECISION: ISRAEL'S CREDIBILITY HAS BEEN DEALT A BLOW; THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION IS HOLDING UP CBU SUPPLY PENDING AN INVESTIGATION AND
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FURTHER ISRAELI ASSURANCES; THE US IS EXPLOITING THE AFFAIR TO MAKE PUBLIC OPINION POINTS AND TO UNDERMINE ISRAEL'S NEGOTIATING POSTURE; AND THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN UNWISE TO PERMIT THIS TO OCCUR. THE ISRAELI PRESS REACTION TO THE ENTIRE AFFAIR HAS BEEN ONE OF EXTRAORDINARY DEFENSIVENESS. THE FACT THAT A VIOLATION OF AN UNDERSTANDING HAS OCCURED IS BARELY ADDRESSED;

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ONLY VAGUE AND CONFLICTING REFERENCES REGARDING CBU
RESTRICTIONS ARE MADE. INSTEAD, ATTENTION IS FOCUSED
ON WHAT IS SEEN AS A FAR MORE SERIOUS VIOLATION:
THAT COMMITTED BY THE US AGAINST THE TRADITIONAL
SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP AND TRUST WHICH HAVE ALWAYS
CHARACHTERIZED US-ISRAELI RELATIONS. END SUMMARY

2. ISRAELI USE OF CBUS IN SOUTH LEBANON IN VIOLATION
OF AGREEMENTS WITH THE US, WHICH WAS REPORTED FOR THE
FIRST TIME EARLY THIS WEEK, HAS IN THE LAST TWO DAYS
BECOME A FULL FLEDGED "AFFAIR". AFTER THE IDF SPOKES-
MAN'S TERSE CONFIRMATION ON SUNDAY OF ISRAELI USE OF
CBUS, THE STORY FINALLY RECEIVED SERIOUS TREATMENT ONLY
YESTERDAY AND TODAY.

3. IN TODAY'S MAARIV AND DAVAR, THE THEMES WERE MORE
FULLY DEVELOPED FOR THE FIRST TIME. MAARIV'S HARIF
DISCUSSED THE EFFECT OF THE "AFFAIR" ON ISRAELI CRED-
IBILITY; BROUGHT UP THE CHARGE THAT THE CARTER ADMIN-
STRATION WAS EXPLOITING IT FOR ITS OWN POLITICAL
INTERESTS; AND SAID ISRAEL'S POSTURE IN WORLD PUBLIC
OPINION WOULD BE FURTHER UNDERMINED AND ITS NEGOTIATING
POSITION SOFTENED. TADMOR IN DAVAR CHARGED THE GOVERN-
MENT WITH INEPTNESS; ASSERTED THAT POLITICAL CONSIDER-
ATIONS WERE NEGLECTED ONCE AGAIN IN THE DE-
CISION-MAKING PROCESS AS WAS THE AMERICAN PUBLIC'S
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SENSITIVITY TO THIS ISSUE; AND CONTENDED THAT THE
ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HAS EXPOSED ISRAEL TO THE AMERICAN
CAMPAIGN OF CRITICISM CURRENTLY BEING CONDUCTED BY PRESS
AND GOVERNMENT ALIKE.

4. THESE TWO ARTICLES ARE ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE RANGE OF
BOTH THE TONE AND SUBSTANCE OF TODAY'S PRESS DISCUSSION OF THE
SUBJECT. IN ADDITION, THE FOLLOWING
POINTS ARE MADE, WITH VARYING DEGREES OF FREQUENCY
AND PROMINENCE.
--THE ADMINISTRATION HAS IMPOSED A TEMPORARY FREEZE ON CBU
SUPPLIES AND APPROVAL TO ISRAEL;
--THE DEGREE OF US SATISFACTION WITH ISRAELI IMPLE-
MENTATION OF A CLOSER SUPERVISION OF THE USE OF CBUS
WILL DETERMINE FUTURE SUPPLY OF SOPHISTICATED
WEAPONRY;
--UP TO THIS POINT THE ADMINISTRATION HAS NOT IN FACT
RECEIVED SATISFACTORY EXPLANATIONS;
--ISRAEL HAS INFORMED THE ADMINISTRATION THAT IDF FIELD
COMMANDERS EMPLOYED CBUS WITHOUT PRIOR APPROVAL FROM
A HIGHER LEVEL;
--THE ADMINISTRATION NOW REQUIRES FIRM ASSURANCE THAT

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US SUPPLIED ARMS WILL BE USED SOLELY FOR DEFENSIVE
PURPOSES (WITH AN EXPLICIT DEFINITION OF "DEFENSIVE
PURPOSES" BEING DETERMINED IN ADVANCE);
--USE OF CBUS MUST BE APPROVED AT POLITICAL LEVEL FOR USE IN THE
CONTEXT OF A DEFENSIVE, GENERAL WAR;
--THE US HAS BEEN INFORMED THAT DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN
HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE LIMITIATIONS OF CBU USE AGREED
TO BY THE RABIN GOVERNMENT;

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USMISSION USUN NY
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AATHE US MEDIA HAS LAUNCHED AN ALL-OUT ATTACK ON
ISRAELI CREDIBILITY WITH ITS EXTENSIVE AND EMOTIONAL
REPORTAGE OF DESTRUCTION CAUSED BY CBUS IN SOUTH
LEBANON.

5. COMMENT: PRESS TREATMENT OF THE CBU AFFAIR
EXPOSES GENERALIZED
ATTITUDES AND REACTIONS. THE OVERRIDING THEME IS
THAT ISRAEL CANNOT ALLOW ITSELF TO BE PLACED IN A WEAK

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POSITION VIS A VIS AN ADMINISTRATION WHICH IS INCREASINGLY
LOOKED UPON AS AN ADVERSARY, WITH HIGHLY SUSPECT MOTIVES.
THE QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT AN AGREEMENT WITH THE
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US WAS VIOLATED IS DISMISSED AS LITTLE MORE THAN
LEGALISTIC QUIBBLING. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INCIDENT
DERIVES FROM THE FACT THAT THE US, A RESULT OF A
MINOR OVERSIGHT ON THE PART OF THE IDF, HAS NOW
GAINED AN IMPORTANT STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE IN ITS MEDIA
CAMPAIGN AGAINST ISRAEL AS WELL AS ITS NEGOTIATING
PRESSURE UPON JERUSALEM. THE LESSON THEN IS THAT
ISRAEL MUST VIGILENTLY PROTECT ITSELF AGAINST OCCURENCES
OF THIS KIND IN THE FUTURE. IMPLICIT IN THIS INTERPRETATION
IS THE CONVICTION THAT A SIMILAR VIOLATION IN THE PAST
(UNDER ANOTHER ADMINISTRATION) WOULD NOT HAVE ELICITED
A NEGATIVE RESPONSE.

6. ISRAELIPRESS REACTION IS AN EXERCISE IN DEFENSIVE-
NESS. THERE IS NO ATTEMPT TO UNDERTAKE A CLOSE
INVESTIGATION OF THE CBU AGREEMENT TO DETERMINE IF AND
TO WHAT EXTENT RESTRICTIONS WERE VIOLATED, IN ORDER TO
DRAW CONCLUSIONS AND TO MAKE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE
DAMAGE. JUST AS THE SUBJECT WAS AVOIDED UNTIL ADMIN-
ISTRATION STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS MADE THIS NO LONGER
POSSIBLE, SO THIS CORE ISSUE IS NEGLECTED IN FAVOR OF
ELABORATION OF ADMINISTRATION MOTIVES. IT SHOULD BE
NOTED THAT THERE IS VERY LITTLE DISTINCTION BETWEEN
THE REACTION OF MEDIA DOVES AND HAWKS IN THIS REGARD;
THE EDITORIAL IN TODAY'S INDEPENDENT HAARETZ, FOR EX-
AMPLE, IS A PARTICULARLY STINGING INDICTMENT OF THE
US ROLE IN THIS AFFAIR.
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